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SUBJECT: PROFILE OF MALAWI FOREIGN MINISTER JOYCE BANDA

REF: STATE 73210

Classified By: Ambassador Alan Eastham for reason 1.4 (C).

¶1. (C) Summary: Minister of Foreign Affairs Joyce Banda is well respected by the Malawian public, and lauded for her strong pro-human rights past. Banda is admittedly out of her element at Foreign Affairs and possesses only a basic knowledge of international relations, however she comes across as forthright and honest in her dealings with Embassy officials. Though she was appointed to her high profile Ministerial position in mid-2006, Banda has seen a sharp decline in her influence within both the Cabinet and the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) over the same period. While Banda had been one of President Mutharika's closest political advisors in the first year and a half of his presidency, including serving as Secretary-General of the DPP, she is now only nominally involved in party politics and instead focuses on her position as Minister of Foreign Affairs. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Banda initially made a name for herself in Malawi as one of the country's leading proponents of human rights and gender equality. As a victim of domestic abuse herself (Banda has described her first husband as abusive), Banda was particularly vocal in the promotion of Malawi's domestic violence bill, along with girls education and empowerment programs. Banda founded and still directs the Joyce Banda Foundation, which runs a large private girls school in the southern city of Blantyre, in addition to serving as a charitable organization.

¶3. (C) After winning election to parliament in 2004, Banda was made Minister of Gender in President Mutharika's first cabinet. Later, when Mutharika split from former President Bakili Muluzi and his political party in early 2005, Banda followed Mutharika and later became Secretary-General of the new Democratic Progressive Party. However, Banda never showed much interest or ability in developing the DPP into a formidable political force (in the words of one prominent Malawian political observer, while Banda has a "heart for the people, she is no politician"). Her competitors for influence with the President--including current Secretary-General Heatherwick Ntaba and Minister of

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Information Patricia Kaliati, among others--had a hand in pushing her out the door, but in the end Banda didn't have the stomach for the politicking required for the party's top job. After her appointment to Minister of Foreign Affairs in mid-2006 Banda quietly resigned from the DPP post of Secretary-General, ostensibly to focus on her Ministerial portfolio. Since her resignation she has

played only a nominal role within the party and has seen her influence with, and access to, President Mutharika decline.

14. (C) Taking up the Foreign Affairs portfolio after serving as Minister of Gender, Banda at first seemed in over her head at the MFA. She admitted as much to Embassy officials in her first meeting after being appointed Minister, stating that the President had put her in the position because he "wanted his Ministers to be well rounded". While she has grown into her position somewhat, Banda still seems only mildly interested in international affairs though she is much more engaged when discussing social issues such as education and human rights. In fact, her cabinet colleagues often joke that whenever Banda speaks her remarks invariably turn to issues of gender, the status of women and children's welfare.

15. (C) Banda is open and outwardly friendly when meeting with Embassy officials, and highly values the opportunities she has had to visit the U.S., both before and after running for office. On an international visitor trip to the U.S. in 1989 Banda met with a number of women's groups to discuss women's empowerment issues, an experience she used to help found a National Association of Business Women in Malawi in 1990. She greatly admires the human rights, good governance and journalistic freedoms inherent in the American political system.

16. (C) While post does not have any information on Akajuwe Enterprises, Banda's primary "business" interests revolve around those organizations run by her charity, primarily the private Joyce Banda Foundation Secondary School in Blantyre, Malawi. The school educates over 800 Malawian girls, and serves as a source of income for Banda and her family. While Banda was involved in small scale garment

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and transport businesses in the past, she currently has no business other than her foundation listed with Malawi's Chamber of Commerce. Though Malawian parliamentarians are not required to declare their assets or business interests to the public, all post contacts confirm that Banda has no significant business interests.

17. (C) Banda is married to former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Richard Banda, who retired after serving in the Malawian judiciary for thirty years. Richard Banda was recently named Chief Justice of Swaziland's Supreme Court, signing a four year contract on May 27, 2007. Banda had been working as a judge at the Swazi Supreme Court of Appeal since early 2006 in a position he took up after his retirement from Malawi's courts. Joyce and Richard have two children together--Kambi Banda and Kumi Banda (both females). Kambi, a sophomore in college, is currently going to a university in Ohio, while Kumi is still in high school. Banda also has three children from her first marriage, Jeff, Edith and Roy Kachale. All three were educated in the U.S., and Edith still lives in the U.S. Roy is the director of the Joyce Banda Foundation, while Jeff runs a computer sales company in Malawi. After the break-up of her first marriage, Banda had a long term relationship with the late Dan Nkosi, who was at that time married to Deputy Reserve Bank Governor Mary Nkosi.

18. (C) Comment: While Banda is still a respected figure within President Mutharika's Cabinet (as shown by her prominent role as Chairperson of Protocol for the extended preparations of the state funeral of First Lady Ethel Mutharika), her influence and importance have considerably waned since she resigned as Secretary-General of the DPP. Though Banda does have some autonomy on minor issues as Minister of Foreign Affairs, President Mutharika has made it clear to all his ministers that no one has full authority to act independently of him, especially on major decisions. Banda still believes that she should focus her

energies on serving the needs of the disenfranchised--particularly in the areas of girls education. The non-stop political bickering of the past three years have largely turned her off to party politics. While she was Minister of Gender Banda commented to Ambassador Eastham that she did like politics and did not intend to run for parliament again, but instead planned to turn her energies back to running her foundation after 2009. However, the political toll on Banda seems to have considerably lessened since resigning from the DPP Secretary General position, and many political observers think it likely that she will indeed run for re-election to Parliament in 2009. End Comment.

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